



## **What is happening with the birds?**

### **Seabird Season 2009, the Central California Coast**

#### **Brown Pelicans**

This year has been particularly challenging for the seabirds along our coast. In the first months of 2009 the International Bird Research and Rescue Center (IBRRC) received 200 Brown Pelicans (mostly adults), and reports of an additional 500 birds that were found sick, dying or disoriented. Many of these birds were emaciated, disoriented and showing signs of neurological damage, likely due to physical stress from the unusual weather patterns, like the extreme cold spell that hit Oregon and Washington (Holcomb, 2009). In February, Fish and Game Commission voted unanimously to remove the Brown Pelican from the endangered species list. The IBRRC stated in a press release that it was opposed to the delisting as Brown Pelicans are still threatened by oil spills, domoic acid events, botulism (at the Salton Sea), pollution, fishing entanglements and changes in food supply.

#### **Cormorants & Grebes**

In the Spring IBRRC began to see a large die-off of Brandt's Cormorants and Western and Clark's Grebes. Beach Watch, a public-private partnership of the Farallones Marine Sanctuary Association and Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary began to document the mortality event of Brandt's Cormorants. Shannon Lyday, the Beach Watch Program Manager reported: "April was the beginning of the mortality event, May was the month with the highest mortality." Beach Watch documented 325 dead Brandt's Cormorants, which is an encounter rate of 1.68 dead per kilometer of beach surveyed. This monthly encounter rate is 3.9 times higher than any previous monthly encounter rate since Beach Watch began in 1993.

## **Common Murres**

In addition to weather, seabirds were also challenged by human disturbance in 2009. Biologists with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) monitor seabirds at Devil's Slide Rock near Pacifica. The season started well with a maximum of 1,003 murres on the rock in May, the greatest attendance since colony restoration began in 1996 (Eigner 2009). Observers witnessed 205 low over-flights (planes below 1,000'), and 31 close approaching boats (kayaks and motorboats), half of which resulted in reactions by nesting seabirds. These disturbance events exacerbated an already stressed population due to poor prey conditions and may have contributed to breeding failure for Common Murres. Later in the season "the rock is empty, there are no murres" said biologist Lisa Eigner of Common Murre Restoration Project. "The birds' breeding attempts have failed and no chicks survived." Find out more about Devil's Slide Rock below.

### **Resource List:**

Eigner, Lisa. The Common Murre Project Update May 2009. The Murre Maniac.  
[http://www.fws.gov/sfbayrefuges/murre/Murre%20Maniacs/MurreManiac\\_July2009.htm](http://www.fws.gov/sfbayrefuges/murre/Murre%20Maniacs/MurreManiac_July2009.htm)

Holcomb, Jay (2009) Event Update, California Brown Pelicans in distress, What IBRRC knows about disoriented, injured, and unusual acting birds. IBRRC Blog. February 11, 2009;  
[http://www.ibrrc.org/pelican\\_update\\_02\\_2009.html](http://www.ibrrc.org/pelican_update_02_2009.html)

IBRRC Blog (2009) California Brown Pelican delisted.  
[http://www.ibrrc.org/California\\_brown\\_pelican\\_delisted.html](http://www.ibrrc.org/California_brown_pelican_delisted.html)

IBRRC Blog (2009) Dying along the shore, hundreds of Brant's Cormorants, Grebes found on area beaches. May 20, 2009. [http://www.ibrrc.org/bird\\_deaths\\_2009.html](http://www.ibrrc.org/bird_deaths_2009.html)

IBRRC Press Release (2009), Unusually high winds blamed for seabird stranding and nesting failures. April 16, 2009.

Kaye, Jane (2009). Hundreds of dead birds on Bay Area beaches. SF Gate: May 2, 2009,  
<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/05/01/MNE817D1TI.DTL>

PRBO Press Release (2009) Highly Variable Oceanic Conditions Affecting Marine Birds. June 25, 2009. <http://www.prbo.org/cms/52#marine>

